

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 AGRE-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-08
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FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6352

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KARACHI 1306 SENT ACTION ISLAMABAD INFO LAHORE, DATED 16 MAR 78,
REPEATED FOR YOUR ACTION:

QUOTE

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE KARACHI 1306

E.O. 11652: NA

TAGS: EGEN, PK

SUBJECT: FIRE AT TPX WAREHOUSES

REF: KARACHI 1238

1. THERE HAVE BEEN NO CHANGES IN THE INITIAL PUBLISHED ESTIMATES OF THE AMOUNT OF COTTON DESTROYED IN THE FIRE: I.E., 40,000 BALES OF COTTON, MEANT FOR EXPORT TO CHINA AND JAPAN, VALUED AT DOLS 3 TO 5 MILLION. THE RICE EXPORT CORPORATION HAS BEEN QUOTED AS ESTIMATING THAT 5,000 TONS OF RICE WERE EITHER COMPLETELY DESTROYED OR DAMAGED. THE NATIONAL INSURANCE CORPORATION, A GOP ENTITY RESPONSIBLE FOR INSURING PUBLIC SECTOR PROPERTY AND INTERESTS, HAS APPOINTED SURVEYORS TO ASSESS THE DAMAGE.

2. THERE IS ALWAYS SUSPICION THAT ESTIMATES OF DAMAGES RESULTING FROM FIRES, PARTICULARLY AT THE PORT OF KARACHI, ARE HIGHLY INFLATED FOR INSURANCE PURPOSES. IN THIS INSTANCE, A PAKISTANI
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EXECUTIVE OF A SHIPPING FIRM HAS TOLD US THAT HE MADE AN INSPECTION OF THE SITE AND HIS ESTIMATE IS THAT NOT MORE THAN 15 TO 20 THOUSAND BALES WERE DESTROYED. ON A PREVIOUS OCCASION WHEN A FAIRLY LARGE NUMBER OF BALES OF JUTE CAUGHT FIRE AT THE PORT, A PORT OFFICIAL COMMENTED TO THE REPORTING OFFICER THAT, "SOME PEOPLE ARE GOING TO MAKE SOME MONEY OUT OF THIS." HE POINTED OUT THAT A LOT OF THE BALES WHICH HAD BEEN DECLARED AS "DESTROYED"

FOR INSURANCE PURPOSES WERE REALLY ONLY HEAVILY SINGED ON THE EXTERIOR AND THAT MOST OF THE JUTE WAS RECOVERABLE. JUDGING FROM PAST EXPERIENCE, WE DO NOT EXPECT THAT AN OFFICIAL ESTIMATE WILL EVER BE PUBLISHED.

3. PORT AUTHORITIES SAY THAT DAMAGES TO THE WAREHOUSES WILL NOT RESULT IN ANY SERIOUS PROBLEMS OF STORAGE SPACE. EXTRA LAND IS BEING MADE AVAILABLE FOR TEMPORARY STORAGE IF NEEDED. IN A VISIT TO THE SITE MARCH 16 WE BY SIGHT ESTIMATED THAT ABOUT 5 OR LESS PERCENT OF THE STORAGE AREA WAS SERIOUSLY DAMAGED. FIRE-FIGHTING PERSONNEL ARE STILL THERE MAINLY TO EXTINGUISH SMOLDERING BALES.

4. IN ANNOUNCING THE TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE INVESTIGATION OF THE FIRE, THE MLA (SIND) HAS STATED THAT THE PANEL OF INQUIRY, TO BE HEADED BY REAR ADMIRAL ARSHAD, WILL AMONG OTHER THINGS EXAMINE RECOMMENDATIONS OF PREVIOUS INQUIRIES ON SIMILAR CASES OF FIRE IN THE TPX TO SEE IF THESE WERE IMPLEMENTED. THE ANNOUNCEMENT ALSO STATES THAT THE INQUIRY ON FINALIZATION WILL BE

RELEASED TO THE PRESS. AS ONE NEWSPAPER POINTED OUT IN AN EDITORIAL, REPORTS OF PREVIOUS PROBES WERE NEVER MADE PUBLIC.

5. ARSON? AS WITH ALL PREVIOUS FIRES, THIS ONE HAS RAISED RUMORS OF ARSON. AND IN THESE DAYS ALL RUMORS ARE GIVEN POLITICAL FLAVORING. AS FAR AS WE CAN RECALL, NO CASE OF ARSON AT THE PORT HAS EVER BEEN ESTABLISHED. IN THIS CASE, THE TPX POLICE BEGAN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THEIR INVESTIGATION BUT WITHOUT ANY REPORTED RESULTS. THE INVESTIGATION IS NOW IN THE HANDS OF THE MLA INQUIRY.

MOORE
UNQUOTE
HUMMEL

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NNN

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